

lived with wage discrimination. She has fought against wage discrimination, and thankfully, she has won. She came here from Baltimore today to tell her story. Ladies and gentlemen, Karen Simmons-Beathea.

[At this point, Ms. Simmons-Beathea, who was the plaintiff in an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission case against the Baltimore Cable Access Corp., made brief remarks, followed by Representatives Rosa L. DeLauro and Eleanor Holmes Norton, Senators Dianne Feinstein and Tom Harkin, and Secretary of Labor Alexis M. Herman.]

The President. I just wanted to say one final thing; some of the Members have alluded to it. But because of the way we introduced each other, seriatim, I don't think we adequately expressed our appreciation to Karen Simmons-Beathea, who really represents what this is all about, and I think we ought to give her another hand. [Applause]

And I will just leave you with this thought. There are a few issues that we're working on today that, unfortunately, tend to get cast in Washington, DC, in terms of a partisan divide. But out in the country, there isn't one. You know, when I was a young boy, I lived with a working grandfather and a working grandmother. I was raised by a working mother. No-

body has lived in one of these families for any period of time without having at least one encounter with some kind of problem we're talking about. And if it ever happens to you, especially when you are a child, you never get over it.

If you go out and talk to Americans around this country, Republicans and independents and Democrats will all tell you more or less the same thing about this issue. This is not a political or a partisan issue anywhere else. Now, you heard Eleanor Holmes Norton saying if somebody doesn't like our bills or they want to talk about the practical impact, well, we can talk about how to word the language and deal with the practical consequences. But whether we do something or not and whether what we do is meaningful or not is not a political or a partisan issue in America, and it shouldn't be here.

And if all of the people who have ever experienced anything like what Karen talked about today would talk to all of the Members of Congress about it, we would get something done, something meaningful, this year.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:20 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. The National Equal Pay Day proclamation of May 11 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Exchange With Reporters Following the National Equal Pay Day Observance

May 11, 2000

[The exchange is joined in progress.]

Forest Fires in Los Alamos, New Mexico

Q. —beyond the usual response which is low interest loans and to actually rebuild the community?

The President. First of all, we're examining all that now. I want to know what the facts are. The Forest Service for a very long time has had these controlled burns, but we have to look in to it to see what the real facts are and what the responsibility of the Government is. And the rule here ought to be the "do right" rule: Whatever the right thing to do is, is exactly what should be done.

Right now we should be focusing on doing everything we can to minimize the damage of the fire and protect the lab assets, deal with the human problems, protect the lab assets. But as we look to rebuild, I think we ought to ascertain the facts and just do what the right thing to do is. That's going to be my policy. And I just don't know about the facts now to be absolutely sure, but as I do, I will be for bending over backwards to do the right thing. That will be my policy.

Elian Gonzalez and Asylum Law

Q. Should Congress put into law whether a 6-year-old boy—or what age a child should be

able to, of his own free will, seek asylum in the United States? Because, of course, it's not in the law right now.

The President. It's not in the law. Well, traditionally, the courts have ruled on these things based on the facts, and there have been certain presumptions about people who were above or below a certain age. And this decision, like others, has been governed by the assumption that a person below a certain age should be spoken for by a parent if the parent is a fit parent. Whether clarifying legislation will be needed, I think no one ever thought so before now. And I think we all ought to just sit and see what the Court of Appeals says and what happens, and that court decision may clarify whether we need legislation or not.

Forest Fires in Los Alamos, New Mexico

Q. Have you now been assured that the laboratory is safe?

Q. Are you going to march on Sunday?

The President. Well, they've taken extraordinary precautions. They've taken extraordinary precautions.

Am I going to what?

Million Mom March

Q. Are you going to march on Sunday?

The President. Well, I'm going to do something to support them. What I want to do is be supportive and do nothing to take away or distract from it. I'm going to do my best to help them. And we have a plan for a way that we—Hillary and I both want to be very supportive, and we will.

Gun Safety Legislation

Q. Do you believe that will motivate Congress—

The President. I don't know, but it ought to, because that's another one of those issues which is far less partisan out in the country than it is here in Washington. It's like this equal pay issue.

Q. —seeing all those women, all those people down there, will that motivate Congress to get this legislation through?

The President. It might or it might not. It depends upon whether the Members of Congress feel the human impact, which to me is the most powerful thing, and also realize that there are more and more people who care about this issue. It's becoming what I call a voting

issue, because that's the thing that very often motivates Congressmen who feel torn, want to do something, but are afraid to do it because of the political implications. Most of the polls you see on issues don't mean anything to them, because the real issue is whether this issue affects how people vote.

And I think if a couple hundred thousand people show up here and several hundred thousand more at these sites around the country, it ought to send a signal that we want America to be a safe country and commonsense gun measures is a part of the strategy. And that, plus just the human impact of the stories, there's a chance it will break through and help us break this logjam. I hope and pray that it will.

Elian Gonzalez and Asylum Law

Q. Any suggestion—

The President. What?

Q. Any suggestion as to when a child might be of his own free will?

The President. I want to wait. I may want to comment on that later, but I think we should, in all fairness, let the Court of Appeals issue their ruling, see what the state of the law is, and then make some sort of judgment about whether legislation is required.

New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani

Q. Any reaction to the Giuliani news yesterday?

The President. Well, I wish him and his wife and their children well on the health front and on the domestic front. I think that's all there is—all anybody should want. People in public life have challenges and difficulties like people in other kinds of life do.

And I've always had a good personal relationship with Mayor Giuliani. It's not been affected by the fact that I think my wife would be a better Senator. And on this, I think everybody in New York and everybody in America ought to be rooting for the human side of this to work out. We should wish him well in his struggle over his illness. We should wish that family well. We should want the best for their children, and we should want some space for all of them, out of the glare of publicity, to work their family issues out. That's what I want, and I hope he gets it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 1:10 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Mayor Giuliani's wife, Donna Hanover, and their children, Andrew and Caroline. The transcript released by the Office

of the Press Secretary did not include the complete opening portion of this exchange. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Conferees on the Patients' Bill of Rights and an Exchange With Reporters

May 11, 2000

Africa and Caribbean Basin Trade Legislation

The President. First of all, I would like to thank this very impressive array of Senate and House Members for coming, in the midst of quite a busy time up on the Hill, as we try to work out the remaining issues to get a strong Patients' Bill of Rights passed.

I'd like to begin just by expressing my gratitude to most recently the Senate but also to the House for the truly historic Africa/Caribbean Basin trade bill that passed by, I think, 77 votes in the Senate today. And this bill passed with big bipartisan majorities in both Houses. And it's an example of the kind of thing we can do if we work together. And I'm very grateful to the Congress for that and very much looking forward to this bill.

Patients' Bill of Rights

Last October the House passed the Norwood-Dingell bill by a big majority, but the conferees have not been able to agree on a bill which could then be taken back to the Senate and the House. So this meeting is to determine what the issues are, what the prospects are for resolving them, to make it clear to these Members that I will offer anybody in the White House, starting with me, day or night, to try to help resolve this and hopefully to get a bill out.

I think it's fair to say that most of us, maybe all of us, really want a bill, not an issue, not a debate. We'd like to pass a bill. And so I'm looking forward to this meeting, and I want to thank you all for coming.

Q. What are the prospects for approving it this year?

The President. Well, you should ask us all after the meeting. [Laughter]

Security at the State Department

Q. Mr. President, the FBI testified today there are possible intelligence officers operating as accredited reporters at the State Department. Does that concern you, sir?

The President. Does it concern you? I should be asking if it concerns you. [Laughter] No, I don't want to make light of this. Of course, the testimony today was the first that I had heard that assertion, and obviously it has to be looked into.

I would have thought that you might have docile intelligence officers masquerading as hostile reporters. [Laughter]

Social Security

Q. Mr. President, this morning you told Diane Rehm about some predictions about what you thought George W. Bush might do if he's elected President, in terms of tax cuts, Supreme Court appointments. Do you also think that he would destroy Social Security by privatizing it, as the Vice President has charged?

The President. I don't want to talk about the campaign here. I'm here trying to get something done. I'll be glad to answer—at some appropriate time, I'll tell you what I think ought to be done on Social Security, although I'm pretty well on the record on that. But I don't think this is an appropriate thing for me to discuss right now.

Permanent Normal Trade Relations With China

Q. Mr. President, do you have any concern about comments by Majority Whip DeLay yesterday that he may not be doing quite as well as he had hoped getting Republican votes for the China bill?

The President. No, because I've noticed he's quite effective at getting votes when the time